

**MnPass  
Focus Groups**

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                         &  
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**Project M-436**

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## BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND STUDY METHOD:

The Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota and Mn/DOT are engaged in a study to learn of the public's perception and attitudes associated with implementing HOV Buy-In capabilities on I-394. Market research among citizens who live in the western metro area of the Twin Cities was commissioned with the following objectives in mind:

- To identify the awareness and acceptance levels of an HOV Buy-In option,
- To identify the perceived benefits and concerns associated with this new program,
- To help in the design of launch-related issues (best way to purchase transponders, how to best communicate with customers, etc.),
- To understand the perceived value of the purchased trip, and
- To capture changes in attitudes relating to an HOV Buy-In – compared to what had been learned earlier.

Focus group discussions were selected as the means to accomplish these objectives. Focus groups are an exploratory research technique designed to elicit insights, attitudes and issues through moderated group discussions. While the **results are not statistically projectable to the population as a whole**, they can provide revealing feedback and directional data on complex topics and newly proposed ideas.

Five focus groups, in total, were conducted. Three focus groups were held with solo drivers (SOVs) who travel I-394 (or an adjacent highway) into or beyond downtown Minneapolis during peak commuting hours to and from work. One focus group was held with carpoolers (HOVs) who travel the same route as above to and from work, and a fifth focus group was held with people who ride the bus to and from work, traveling I-394 into or beyond downtown Minneapolis. The groups were held in 2004 on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, March 1<sup>st</sup> and March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The participants in the focus groups represented a general cross section of the population from the Twin Cities (mix of age, income, employment and gender) who commute from the western metro into or beyond downtown Minneapolis, during peak commuting hours and travel I-394

or an adjacent highway, such as Hwy 55 or Hwy 7. The participants were recruited (randomly) by telephone from the local areas, answered an advertisement that appeared in the StarTribune or a local newspaper or responded to a flyer that was distributed at the TAD garages. Qualified individuals were invited to come to a central location to discuss this topic.

In cooperation with the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and Mn/DOT, Cook Research & Consulting, Inc., was responsible for hosting the focus groups, group moderating and preparing the final report.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

### **Reactions to the Current I-394**

*Residents from the western suburbs of the Twin Cities metropolitan area who commute to and from work into or beyond downtown Minneapolis (during peak commuting hours) are nearly uniform in their belief that “something needs to be done with the HOV lanes on I-394.”* For many of the residents who lived in the western suburbs before I-394 was built, they thought a re-built Highway 12 would likely solve any problems they had while driving Highway 12 to and from work (into or beyond downtown Minneapolis) during peak commuting hours. For most, I-394 did not solve many of those problems, and the presence of HOV lanes seemingly did little to reduce the amount of traffic traveling the free lanes.

**Most of the participants in the focus groups state that the HOV lanes have been vastly underused and have done far too little to promote transit usage or to encourage carpooling.** Solo drivers, in particular, have driven parallel to the HOV lanes during the years that I-394 has served the western metro and are continuously aware of the few vehicles using the HOV lanes. Many drivers have long wondered why Mn/DOT has allowed the HOV lanes to exist for so long in their present underused condition. To these drivers, the goal of the HOV lanes to encourage transit usage and carpooling has not been met nor does it seem likely that it can be met. Not only do most workers in the Twin Cities prefer to drive their own vehicles to work, but the transit system is not extensive enough nor is the service frequent enough to provide a viable alternative to solo driving.

As a result, the free lanes are often congested during peak commuting hours while the HOV lanes appear to be used by too few vehicles. This lack of usage equates with a “failed experiment” by Mn/DOT. It seems apparent that most of the participants in the focus groups are unaware of the process undertaken to build I-394 and are unaware of the financial support provided by the federal government to construct HOV lanes as a part of the construction process. In addition, there appears to be little, if any, knowledge about the restraints imposed upon Mn/DOT during the construction process by the communities through which I-394 passes.

*The end result of the construction provided a divided freeway that did not come close to meeting the expectations of the residents of the western suburbs and has, for many, been a real disappointment. As they travel I-394 during peak commuting times, the disappointment with the freeway does not disappear; it has seemingly continued to grow. Some of the solo drivers on I-394 during peak commuting times (as well as those who do what they can to avoid having to drive I-394) are “angry!” They profess to be angry at Mn/DOT for constructing such a highway; they get angry watching solo drivers move onto the HOV lanes (in violation of the law) and not get stopped by law enforcement officials, they get angry when an officer does pull over an HOV violator, and in the process, causes traffic to slow down and back up, and they get angry with the congestion that develops at the eastern end of I-394 where drivers are trying to “jockey” their vehicles into the east-bound lanes of I-94 to pass through the Lowry Hill Tunnel.*

Among those who feel that the HOV lanes (or “sane lanes” as most call them) have been “terribly underused” and need to be “opened up” is the solo driver who says, “I’m angry when I see an empty sane lane!”

**For many of these drivers, there is a simple answer to the problems on I-394 – open the HOV lanes to all drivers all of the time.** This is the scenario within which the concept of MnPass was presented to and evaluated by participants in five focus groups held in late February and early March 2004.

### **Reactions to MnPass**

*The participants in the focus groups express an array of reactions to the concept of opening the HOV lanes to solo drivers who are willing to pay for the opportunity to drive in the lanes.*

Among the comments from those supporting the concept are the following:

- Many feel it is “about time” that something is done with the I-394 HOV lanes. While the MnPass concept may not be their preference for “opening up” the HOV lanes, there is hope that enough drivers might opt to pay to drive the express lanes that the free lanes will open up somewhat.

- For some, the ability to pay and drive the express lanes could mean the difference between being on time versus being late for work or for a meeting, being able to pick up a child from daycare on time versus paying a late fee and risking the enmity of the daycare provider, being able to attend a child's event or activity versus missing it or arriving late or any number of additional reasons. (One participant who welcomes the MnPass option identifies her daycare as a place where a child with a late-arriving parent is taken to a Children's Shelter at closing time rather than having someone stay around the daycare with the child until a parent arrives. Other parents with children in daycare report having to pay for each late minute; one parent is charged \$10.00 for the first five minutes while others pay varying fees for being late.)
- An additional reason drivers may choose to pay the fee and drive the express lanes is for their mental health. Several of the solo drivers report experiencing various degrees of "stress" while driving on I-394 when the free lanes are crowded with traffic and the vehicles are barely moving. Opting to pay the fee to drive the express lanes would provide another alternative for solo drivers. Other options open to the solo drivers to reduce "stress" and used by several include finding alternate routes to take regularly or occasionally and leaving for or from work earlier or later than usual. The most popular option appears to be leaving for work earlier than usual; many have "experimented" with a time that works for them and note that leaving a few minutes earlier or later can shorten their commute by several minutes.
- While it seems to be somewhat difficult for the participants to understand that any excess revenues would be used "to improve transit and other transportation needs on I-394," there is hope that dollars committed to transit may mean more frequent buses traveling the I-394 corridor with service that extends throughout the day.
- There are a few participants who welcome the opportunity to travel the express lanes with some frequency. A few dollars spent per day would be an acceptable expenditure if it allowed the drivers to travel in a faster lane with less stressful driving conditions. For one or two, paying to drive the express lanes would merely become a verifiable "deductible business expense" for them or their companies. One participant who owns a company says it would be worthwhile for his firm to pay the cost for employees to drive the express lanes to get them to work or to appointments quicker and with less hassle. Another says, "When pressed for time, it'd be worth it."

- Some of the participants who regularly carpool or ride the bus frequently mention that MnPass provides them the opportunity to occasionally drive I-394 and “enjoy” the convenience of the express lanes that they are also able to regularly experience in their carpools or on the bus. This would likely be a seldom-used option, but it does present them with the opportunity to do so if they should choose. (At present, their only option when driving alone is to drive in the free lanes of traffic and endure any congestion that may be present.)
- Several of the participants understand that “dynamic pricing” may work to discourage enough solo drivers from paying to drive in the express lanes that the commute of those who are driving there will not be compromised. These participants understand that this is how “dynamic pricing” works.

There are questions that arise in the focus groups regarding the MnPass concept.

- A few of the participants wonder if commercial vehicles will be able to drive the express lanes and question if there will be a vehicle size limit.
- Some wonder how “out-of-towners” will be treated who do not know of the driving restrictions for the express lanes, inadvertently end up driving the lanes and get stopped by a law enforcement person.
- Several wonder how violators can be effectively identified and how will a vehicle be pulled over without causing the type of traffic backup that occurs now with a “pulled over” violator.
- There are several questions about the transponder: what happens if it is lost or stolen; does putting the transponder in a pouch really mean that the transponder cannot be read by the toll recording equipment; what happens if the transponder’s batteries wear out; what happens if the transponder does not tell a driver that an account balance is low; etc.?
- Among the participants who are likely to secure a transponder and establish an account are those who question why they could not merely pay a sizeable deposit upon receiving their transponder or purchase the transponder outright. This seems to make more sense to them than having to pay a “small monthly service fee.”



Initially, there are several negative reactions to the MnPass concept.

- Some carpoolers and bus riders are concerned that allowing solo drivers to pay a fee to drive the express lanes could “clog up the sane lane for carpoolers and bus riders” and slow up their commute. Carpoolers and bus riders believe they give up quite a bit to be able to carpool or ride a bus and have become somewhat “possessive” of the HOV lanes; however, they do acknowledge that the lanes are certainly underutilized.
- Some wonder if opening up the express lanes to solo drivers could become a disincentive to carpoolers and bus riders to continue commuting as they have. They believe that carpoolers and bus riders have to compromise a great deal to commute via the “sane lane” and question if there would be sufficient incentive for them to continue carpooling or riding the bus if they could simply pay a fee to drive on the express lanes alone.
- Many of the participants believe that additional traffic in the express lanes will only slow down the “sane lanes resulting in more brakes, more stops and starts.” Most find it difficult to believe that drivers will be able to maintain a speed of 50-55 miles per hour or on the express lanes when the amount of traffic is expected to increase. Several note that there are times when drivers on the HOV lanes already travel well below a speed of 50-55 miles per hour.
- Several expect that allowing solo drivers who pay onto the express lanes will certainly add to the problem of “bottlenecks” at the eastern end of I-394. At the present time, there is often a major backup of traffic for those vehicles that will be traveling east on I-94 through the Lowry Hill Tunnel. Vehicles coming off the HOV lanes often weave with I-94 traffic before they go through the tunnel to get to I-35W. More traffic in these lanes could exacerbate the problem. In addition, allowing traffic to merge into the lanes waiting to exit onto I-94 is already a problem because Minnesota drivers are not known to be patient or considerate drivers when allowing other drivers to merge. One participant notes, “Minnesotans are not your best and most considerate drivers.”
- Some are concerned that opening the HOV lanes to solo drivers who are willing to and *able to* pay is discriminatory. They believe that it will be “unfair” to low-income individuals who would likely not have the money to pay the fee to drive the express lanes. The express lanes could then be available to those who can afford to pay to

drive them, making the opportunity available only to those who are “privileged” – those who drive SUVs from the far western suburbs.

- There is significant concern about how drivers will be able to move onto and off the express lanes. Drivers in the free lanes already describe “harrowing” experiences where a bus or a car nearly “cuts them off” as the bus or car moves across the free lanes to enter the “sane lanes.” Opening the HOV lanes to more drivers may merely add to this problem. Participants picture vehicles swerving onto and off the express lanes with little regard for the safety of the drivers of vehicles in the free lanes. Some maintain that drivers “take chances getting over to the ‘sane lanes’ or when switching lanes.”
- There are several who are concerned about how law enforcement agencies will be able to discourage the “law breakers.” There are many instances cited currently about improper usage of the HOV lanes, and many think this problem will only escalate. While the drivers in the free lanes would like to see stricter enforcement of the law, these drivers also know that any stopped vehicle with an officer and squad car present mean that the flow of traffic will be interrupted, slowing down significantly. Although pleased that the violator has not gotten away with breaking the law, there is little support for more enforcement, if such enforcement would mean more frequent interruptions to the flow of traffic on the free lanes.
- A few believe, however, that to make the system work, there will need to be more stringent efforts to keep violators off the express lanes. In order to do so, they expect that the increased enforcement will be quite expensive and will use a significant amount of the fees paid to drive the express lanes.
- When it occurs to them that the express lanes will be “tolled” throughout the day, some question why this needs to happen during the times of the day when there is a reduced amount of traffic. Accepting this aspect of the MnPass concept may require “quite a stretch” for those who have been able to drive the HOV lanes after rush hours.
- Also questioned is why the express lanes would be inbound during the a.m. and outbound during the p.m. Many of the drivers tell of an extreme amount of traffic traveling east on I-394 in the afternoon; often times, the traffic is so heavy that it results in “stop and go” driving. They wonder why one of the lanes between Highway

100 and downtown Minneapolis could not be opened to eastbound traffic during the afternoons.

- Not well understood and certainly not well accepted is the idea of two tolls when driving I-394 both west and east of Highway 100. This part of the concept is most confusing to the participants in the focus groups and seems to make little sense.
- While several are pleased that Mn/DOT has seemingly recognized the problems with the HOV lanes on I-394 and feel there may be some justification for Mn/DOT to allow solo drivers to pay a toll to drive I-394, they also express a real concern that this is a “band aid” approach – it would be much better if Mn/DOT recognized that the concept for HOV lanes has failed, and open the lanes up to everyone to drive.

Those thinking it is a “band aid” approach caution that the increased growth in the western suburbs and a more “open” I-394 will only mean that within a short period of time all of the lanes on I-394 will be so heavily traveled during peak hours that none of the lanes will be free flowing.

According to some participants, this might happen even if MnPass is implemented because some expect so many drivers will be willing to pay to drive the express lanes that the openness of the free lanes will soon be filled by those who return to I-394 to commute to work as well as the expected increase in the number of drivers due to the population growth of the western suburbs.

- There are some who are concerned that opening one expressway to “tolling” will merely “open the floodgates” to “tolling” on other Twin Cities expressways. I-35W is cited as the most likely next candidate for “tolling.”
- Some fault MnPass as giving in to a “pay to play” mentality while others mention the payment will be a “luxury” or “convenience” tax, affordable only to those who have the ability to pay.
- For a few, the opportunity to promote solo driving could serve as the “death knell” for public transportation. Knowing how Minnesotans “love” to drive, if enough who rely on mass transit took advantage of the program and paid the fee to drive on the express lanes, they could, in turn, “kill” mass transit when sufficient numbers of transit users choose to abandon the busses.

## **Will MnPass Be Used?**

*There is little doubt that some of the solo drivers on I-394 will take advantage of the opportunity to pay a fee to travel on the express lanes.* While most do not expect to make frequent use of the express lanes, these drivers do view MnPass as the opportunity to drive the express lanes and reach their destination faster than they could by staying in the free lanes. They also expect to be less stressed and more relaxed when they reach their destination after driving the express lanes.

**Yet, there is much the commuters from the western metro need to know about the MnPass concept.** While some of the participants in the focus groups have experienced “fast pass” lanes on out-of-state toll roads, they have usually noticed that vehicles going through the “fast pass” lanes needed to slow down, often to wait for a gate to go up before they could continue. It is, therefore, hard for Minnesota drivers to picture how an “electronic toll collection system” could work where drivers could maintain their speed while passing under “toll recording equipment.”

The participants also appear to have difficulty understanding how an appropriate amount will be charged to their accounts when driving the express lanes. The “getting on and exiting” puzzles several, leaving them to wonder how accurate their charges might be.

**Most of the drivers have an amount in mind they would expect to pay to drive the express lanes as a solo driver.** *This amount ranges from a low of fifty cents to a high of approximately \$2.50 (an amount equivalent to a one-way bus ticket).* A real “bargain” would be twenty-five cents for some to one dollar or more for some others. Most report that an amount above three or four dollars would be more than they would be willing to spend to drive the express lanes. However, some mention that the opportunity to drive the express lanes when they “really needed to be someplace” could be a bargain at ten dollars or even slightly more. Five dollars would be a deterrent to several, but it could be affordable to those who are in a hurry.

There is concern for the low-income commuter who may not be able to pay to drive the express lanes on I-394. Some of the participants cite the concept as being discriminatory; however, many of the participants note that even low-income commuters could benefit from MnPass, if MnPass is successful at transferring some of the heavy traffic from the free lanes to

fill in open spaces on the express lanes. Freeing up space on the free lanes could benefit the drivers of these lanes and provide a “boost” to those who are unable to pay to drive the express lanes.

*The idea of paying “a small monthly service fee for the transponder” seems inappropriate to several of the participants in the focus groups. If a fee were charged, many would not expect it to exceed one or two dollars a month. However, any fee seems excessive for something that would be used by those who only occasionally would resort to driving the express lanes. Some would prefer to pay a deposit fee while others would prefer to purchase their transponders outright.*

### **Other Issues**

Not surprisingly, some of the participants mention they would like to see I-394 widened and opened up to all drivers. Others encourage Mn/DOT to push for an increase in the gas tax to better fund transportation and to pour more dollars into public transportation because the current public transportation system “stinks.” A few, of course, mention adding light rail to the middle of I-394, but others claim to oppose any light rail.

As has been discussed previously, few of the commuters who use (or consciously avoid using) I-394 know little about how the highway was designed, funded or constructed. They know almost nothing about the impact the communities along I-394 had on the design and expect any shortcomings of the highway are merely the result of “a poor job” by Mn/DOT.

Finally, for the several who believe the HOV lanes on I-394 have been a “dismal failure,” they suggest it is about time that Mn/DOT does something about correcting the problem with these lanes. For many, the MnPass concept may prove effective, but some participants will remain skeptical about allowing solo drivers to pay a fee to drive the express lanes.

## APPENDIX

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Moderator
- B. Focus Group
- C. Facility
  - 1. Mirror/Observers
  - 2. Microphones/Audio Taping
  - 3. Cameras/Videotaping
  - 4. Notes from Observers
- D. Respondents
- E. Topic for Focus Group

II. CURRENT COMMUTING EXPERIENCE

A. Morning and Afternoon Commute

- 1. Leaving from where? Eventual destination?
    - a) Driving by self?
    - b) In a carpool?
      - 1) Number of persons in carpool? Are they related to you?
      - 2) Number of years carpooling?
      - 3) How was the carpool put together? Changes?
      - 4) Reasons for forming the carpool? To use the I-394 Carpool Lanes?
        - 5) (IF DESTINATION IS DOWNTOWN MINNEAPOLIS) Do you park in the lots provided for carpoolers? How much do you pay? (IF NOT) Why do you park elsewhere? Else?
    - c) Ever use the bus? Why?
  - 2. Where and approximately when enter I-394? Hwy. 55?
  - 3. (FOR SOVs) Ever use the Carpool Lanes? How often?
  - 4. Time of commute?
- B. How is the flow of traffic?
- 1. Ever do anything to avoid the traffic?

2. What? Why?
- C. (FOR BUS RIDERS AND CARPOOLERS ONLY) Improving service on I-394.
1. (FOR BUS RIDERS) What do you think could be done to improve bus service along I-394? Why do you say that? What else?
  2. (FOR CARPOOLERS) What do you think could be done to improve carpooling services on I-394? Why do you say that? What else?

## II. INTRODUCTION TO MnPass AND THE I-394 EXPRESS LANES

### A. PASS OUT AND READ DESCRIPTION OF MnPass AND THE I-394 EXPRESS LANES.

1. You've now heard a description of the MnPass Program for the Express Lanes on I-394.
  - a) Overall, what are your *initial* impressions about MnPass? Why do you say that? Else?
    - 1) Based upon what you have heard, please write down what you would expect to pay to travel in the Express Lanes on I-394.
    - 2) Then, write down an amount that would tell me it would be a "bargain" for you to be able to travel in the Express Lanes, if you paid this amount.
    - 3) Finally, at what price would you perceive being able to travel in the Express Lanes to be too "expensive" for you to pay it? Please write this amount down.
  - b) Initially, what do you think you like about MnPass? Why do you say that? Else?
  - c) Initially, what concerns might you have about MnPass? Why do you say that? Else?
2. Now, I'd like to hear you talk about if you think MnPass will change anything about your commute into or beyond downtown Minneapolis, in the morning or afternoon/evening.
3. Do you expect there will be any changes in traffic flow due to MnPass?
  - a) Why do you say that?
  - b) What do you think might change? What else?



- c) Why do you think these changes might occur? What else?
- 4. Would you expect to see any change in the way you commute in the morning?
  - a) (IF NO) Why do you say that?
  - b) (IF YES) What would you expect to change? Why do you say that?
- 5. Would you expect to see any change in the way you commute in the afternoon or evening?
  - a) (IF NO) Why do you say that?
  - b) (IF YES) What would you expect to change? Why do you say that?
- 6. Do you think you might alter your route into Minneapolis or beyond? The route you take home?
  - a) (IF NO) Why do you say that?
  - b) (IF YES) How would you expect to alter your route into Minneapolis or beyond? The route you take home? Why would you alter your route? What else?
- B. Do you expect that MnPass will improve your commute on I-394? (Will you be more likely to travel I-394, when MnPass is operational?)
  - 1. Why do you say that?
  - 2. What else?
- C. Do you think you will expect to see any more traffic in the Express Lanes than you see now?
  - 1. Why do you say that?
  - 2. Will you expect to see any less traffic in the other lanes than you see now?
    - a) Why do you say that?
    - b) Will you expect that some of the drivers currently using the other lanes would begin using the Express Lanes? Why do you say that?
  - 3. Who might the users be? Do you think current carpoolers or bus riders would become users of MnPass?
    - a) Why do you say that?

- b) Would this opportunity attract new drivers into this area? Why do you say that?
  - 4. For what reasons do you think a driver might choose to travel in this lane?
    - a) Why do you say that?
    - b) Any other reasons? What? Why do you say that?
- D. What are your thoughts as to why Mn/DOT is doing this?
  - 1. Why do you say that?
  - 2. What else?

#### IV. REACTIONS TO ELEMENTS OF MnPass

- A. How likely are you to take advantage of the opportunity that MnPass provides for people traveling on I-394?
  - 1. Why do you say that?
    - a) Would you use it for a fee? Why? Why not?
      - 1) Let's go back to the amount of money you wrote down earlier. Look again at what you wrote down; if you think you would like to change the amount you wrote down earlier, please draw a single line through that amount and write in a new amount. Let's do the same for the amount you wrote down that you thought would be a "bargain" and the amount you wrote down that you think would be too "expensive."
      - 2) What amounts did you write down? Would you pay that amount? Why? Why not?
    - b) Expected frequency of use?
    - c) When do you think you would make use of MnPass? Why do you say that?
    - d) What are some reasons why you would not make use of MnPass? Why do you say that?
  - 2. Would you use whatever the price? Why? Why not?
  - 3. Anyone who you think would not use this? Why do you say that?
- B. What questions do you have? What else do you need to know?

1. Any regarding how to acquire the transponder? Why do you say that?
  2. Any regarding the billing process? Why do you say that?
  3. Any regarding the hours of operation? Why do you say that?
  4. Any regarding number of places to enter / to exit? Why do you say that?
  5. Any regarding the stepped-up level of enforcement? Why do you say that?
  6. What else?
- C. (FOR BUS RIDERS AND CARPOOLERS ONLY) Improving service on I-394, revisited.
1. (FOR BUS RIDERS) Any additional thoughts about what you think could be done to improve bus service along I-394? Why do you say that? What else
  2. (FOR CARPOOLERS) Any additional thoughts about what you think could be done to improve carpooling services on I-394? Why do you say that? What else?

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Likelihood of use?
1. In conclusion, would you use? Why do you say that?
  2. Expected frequency of use?
- B. Is this a fair program? Why do you say that?
1. For current HOV lane users?
  2. For transit riders?
  3. For the solo driver?
- C. What are the benefits to MnPass? Why do you say that?

## Frequently Asked Questions about MnPass and the I-394 Express Lanes

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### 1. What are the I-394 Express Lanes and how will they work?

As part of a long-term plan to improve traffic flow on I-394, the HOV (Sane) lanes are being converted to *Express Lanes* or High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes. Transit users, carpoolers and motorcyclists will still be able to use the Express Lanes for free. But if you drive alone and want a more convenient and reliable trip, you can choose to use the new Express Lanes for a fee that will vary depending on the level of congestion on the Express Lanes and the time of day. This concept has been successfully used in Houston, San Diego and Orange County, CA for many years.

- The new I-394 Express Lanes are expected to operate up to 24 hours a day: inbound all morning, outbound all afternoon and evening.
- Actual tolls will vary based on real-time traffic levels on the I-394 Express Lanes to make sure that traffic will remain flowing at about 50 to 55 miles per hour.
- The toll will be posted on MnPass toll signs located overhead, just before the entrance to the Express Lanes.
- Signs will clearly identify entrances and exit points.
- The operation will be fully electronic—no toll booths, gates or arms, no slowing down or stopping to drop coins.

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### 2. How many lanes will the Express Lanes have?

The new Express Lanes will replicate the current HOV Lanes: the reversible section will have two lanes inbound half the time (a.m.) and two lanes outbound in the p.m. and evening. The diamond lanes will be one lane inbound and one outbound. Double white lines will be added to separate the Express Lanes from the regular lanes.

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### 3. What is "MnPass"™?

*MnPass* is the name of the electronic toll collection system that enables you to use the new I-394 Express Lanes without stopping. The *MnPass* system is made up of an electronic tag (transponder) that is mounted on the inside of your vehicle's windshield, toll recording equipment located on the road and an enforcement system. You can use your *MnPass* transponder anywhere you see the *MnPass* name or symbol.

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### 4. I am a solo driver and want to try the new I-394 Express Lanes. What do I need to do?

To use the new I-394 Express Lanes, you must first open a prepaid *MnPass* account and obtain a *MnPass* transponder.

Beginning later this year, solo drivers who want to use the I-394 Express Lanes will be able to open a prepaid *MnPass* account using a credit card, check or money order. *MnPass* customers will be issued an electronic *MnPass* transponder.

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### 5. What is a "transponder" and how does it work?

The *MnPass* transponder is a small battery-powered radio device, which is mounted inside the vehicle on the windshield and identifies the customer's prepaid toll account. When traveling through the toll zone, an overhead antenna reads the transponder (even at speeds over 60 miles per hour), and the posted toll amount is automatically deducted from the customer's account. You will be able to move the transponder from one vehicle to another.

When the transponder account balance falls below a certain level, a light in the transponder will go on to let you know that you need to add to your account.

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6. **Where can I get a transponder and how much will it cost me?**

You can order a transponder by phone, through the Internet or by mail, or you can pick one up at a customer service center. You can pay by credit card, check or money order. You will be charged a small monthly service fee for the transponder.

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7. **How can I use the I-394 Express Lanes?**

As your vehicle approaches the I-394 Express Lanes, an overhead electronic sign will display the current toll being charged. Customers can choose the Express Lanes and pay a toll, or continue to travel on the regular freeway lanes for free. Carpools -- vehicles with two or more people, motorcycles and transit buses can enter the Express Lanes and use them for free.

All you have to do is safely merge into the Express Lanes at designated entry points along I-394. ***MnPass Only*** signs will direct you where to enter the lane. You may exit the Express Lanes only at designated points along I-394.

**Except at designated locations, the Express Lanes will be separated from the regular lanes by white lines. It is illegal to cross these lines.**

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8. **How will tolls be set on the I-394 Express Lanes?**

MnDOT's goal is to ensure that traffic is always flowing smoothly in the Express Lanes. To do this, MnDOT will use a system called "dynamic pricing."

Here's how it works. Tolls will be set based on the amount of traffic traveling in the Express Lanes at any given time. During peak periods, when there is more traffic on the Express Lanes, the toll will be higher. During off-peak periods, when fewer vehicles are using the lanes, the toll will be lower. By changing the toll in response to the level of demand, traffic on the Express Lanes will keep flowing smoothly. Dynamic pricing has been used successfully in the San Diego Express Lanes for several years.

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9. **Will tolls vary based on the length of the trip?**

Two toll levels are planned. One toll will apply to any trip entering the Express Lanes prior to TH 100 and exiting prior to, or at, TH 100. A second, higher toll will apply to any trip entering the Express Lanes at, or prior to, TH 100 and exiting at I-94 or downtown. The reverse will apply for the outbound direction.

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10. **What if the tolls change once I am in the Express Lanes?**

The toll you see displayed on the toll sign just before you enter the Express Lane will apply for your trip. Your toll will not change no matter how many times the display changes during your trip.

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11. **What if I use the lanes without two or more occupants in my vehicle or without *MnPass*?**

You would be in violation of state law and subject to a heavy fine. Minnesota State Law requires motorists traveling alone on the I-394 Express Lanes to enter and exit the Express Lanes only at designated points along I-394. Solo drivers must have a *MnPass* transponder properly mounted on their vehicle and they must have a valid *MnPass* account. This law is

enforced by the Minnesota State Patrol or other enforcement officers. You must be sure that your account is always in good standing and that your transponder is properly mounted in your vehicle.

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**12. What if I am normally a solo driver, but on a given trip I have a passenger in my car: How do I keep from getting charged for that trip?**

You will be given a special bag that you can place your transponder in when you are carpooling. If there are two or more occupants in your car, placing your transponder in the special bag will prevent the electronic toll collection system from deducting a toll. However, enforcement officers will verify that there are at least two of you in the car.

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**13. How do I find out what my charges are?**

You will receive a periodic statement showing the date and time of each charge.

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**14. How will toll revenues be used?**

The tolls will pay for operation of the lanes. Excess revenues will be used to improve transit and other transportation needs on I-394.